**All the little shards: Poems**

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**Abstract**

*all the little shards* is a collection of short personal poems about place, examining the 24 year old speaker's move from stagnation in semi-rural Ontario to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. As the speaker explores place and life in a new location without any support systems, he struggles with clinical depression, alcohol, social anxiety and ineptitude, as well as loneliness and dissociation with people and place. Isolation and defamiliarization of places and vernacular permeate the collection, and as the narrative progresses the speaker tries to embrace his new home to create, overcome, and enjoy a distinctly different mentality of place. The use of formal styles of poetry and flâneur motifs help locate the speaker and his thoughts while lyrical free-form pieces bring in pauses for meditation, and questions that change the speaker's perspective, painting pictures of places scattered across the urban and rural prairie.

The collection is a journey through self and place, bookended by uncertainty towards the future and the looming move away from a norm—from Ontario to Saskatchewan, and from Saskatchewan to the uncertain right as things seem to be falling into place. This uncertainty about what was before and what comes after is confronted by the aforementioned questions as places become fluid, and the speaker's changed perspective creates personal dissonance and new appreciation for Saskatchewan.

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**Artist's Statement**

*all the little shards* is a poetry collection of short personal lyrics that enact a journey through a following the speaker's final moments of undergraduate studies at the University of Western Ontario, moments of stagnation briefly in his hometown of Owen Sound, Ontario, before being accepted to the University of Saskatchewan's MFA in Writing program and moving far away from the known. As the journey progresses the speaker faces struggles with depression, loneliness, and cultural isolation, coping with these issues using a variety of mechanisms including a dissociative flâneur, humour, therapy, and alcohol. The bulk of the collection takes places on the urban prairie, covering locations including Winston's Pub, Flint's Saloon, the trails on the South Saskatchewan banks, and others within the city limits. The ventures outside of the city proper usually stand at a moment where the speaker experiences a moment of questioning that extends outside himself, embracing motifs of either flâneur ideals or a moment of comedic impact.

The concept of the flâneur refers to several different ideas, including the more literal definitions: "an idle man-about-town" (Merriam Webster) and "an idler or lounger" (Google). The collection enacts both of these definitions which ascribe the man about town(s) and the idle lounger taking in the sights, but also skirts the literary tradition of the flâneur. James Werner's book "American Flâneur: The Cosmic Physiognomy of Edgar Allan Poe" calls the flâneur a "strolling urban observer," and "the most appropriate mode of viewing and negotiating the complexities of the city" (1). For this, of course, *all the little shards* has made some small changes. The city landscape has been occasionally substituted in a conscious move which enacts the "haha, the prairies have no cities" joke, and expanding the stylistic flâneur out into the larger Saskatchewan prairie. Werner touts that the life and loves of the flâneur have "by no means been relegated to intellectual or cultural obscurity … with its emphasis on the discontinuities and dislocations of urban life, flânerie has made a significant impact on theories of modernity" (1). By its literary implications, flâneur evolves beyond the simplified scope of its literal

definitions and implications to invoke statements about place. The flâneur of place is strongly enacted in this collection, though the facets of social critique are lessened, and the modernity has been tainted by post-modern and romantic influences. Werner argues that though flâneur has it roots in the Parisian excess and Wilde's theories of aesthetics, it has sources in literature dating even back to Renaissance England (2). The "one consistent element [of the flâneur] has been the action of seeing and observing his surroundings. Although it appears to be casual, this act of observing has a particularly analytical dimension; it is not simply 'taking air' or 'window-shopping'" (2).

The poems "A Bald Prayer" and "Interlude (Tongue-Tied)," for example, still interact with a comic motif, but still enact the flâneur experience of subtle analytical discourse overlain with a simple observing. "A Bald Prayer" describe a very particular moment where the speaker, driving a 2013 Ford Explorer and towing every worldly possession that he owns, arrives at a moment some time after the Ontario-Manitoba border where reality sets in and he is faced with a starkly different landscape forcing an introspective examination of place via the flâneur's approach to observing and witnessing. "Interlude(Tongue-Tied)" features a light-hearted joke, focused on the ridiculous portmanteau that people not from Saskatchewan say, conflating "Saskatoon" with "Saskatchewan" to create "Saskatchatoon," which is a slip of the tongue repeated by many not from the province and demonstrates a sort of ignorance visible in the speaker, and a humourous interaction with place that echoes throughout the collection.

*all the little shards* began as an exercise in catharsis, an attempt to rationalize and reconcile life in a completely different place and with no systems of support or familiarity. The collection, and the writing on the collection, were a coping mechanism of sorts, attempting to exhaust the issues that plagued the speaker as he struggled to adjust to an alien landscape. As time progressed, the collection became less a cathartic movement and more a love letter to place, a detailing of experiences and environments and how they impact and change the speaker. The distilling down of theme to close

examinations of place leads to a sort of flâneur motif, where the speaker possesses a more passive role in the poems where he walks, and the romantic sublime experience entwines with the gazing and occurs in various places at different moments. The collection does not strictly adhere to this idle walking and flower-gazing, broaching (lightly) topics revolving around the speaker's family and how they entwine with different places in this formative and separative experience. The weaving of very different formal styles serves to break up the potential monotony of free form lyrics while providing a feeling of being jarred with a sprinkling of uncertainty to mirror what the speaker feels. The usage of different forms facilitated a conversation with other poets through these forms, most notably Don McKay, John Steffler, Elizabeth Philips, and Lisa-Bird Wilson.

As the collection progresses the weaving of forms and more lyric verses demonstrate shifts in the speaker's perspective. A distinct example of this comes from "Riverwalk," where the speaker enacts a very hurried tone, void of punctuation or care, and the prosaic form is shattered and sectioned off into pseudo-stanzas. The content demonstrates a confused state of mind, where a simple frozen puddle jars the speaker and sends a tangential train of thought which spirals out in rapid unconnected thought to remark on the fragile state of mind the speaker possessed during his first Saskatchewan winter. In the final stanza the spirals twist into a gyre and the world becomes full of "brimstone" (9) as "thought is latticed" (11) and the speaker connects back to the world of the urban prairie as an unexplored wilderness, "lost" (12). The splintered prosaic form reflects the splintering content, which in turn is a metaphor for the speaker's own issues. The following poem, "Every Night my Teeth are Falling Out," brings the mental spinning out to the fore on a more personal level as we visit the speaker's waking dreams again, where a fractured sense of identity becomes prevalent again. We return to a pleasantly external place in the following poem "Memento Mori," though the speaker nods to the great inevitable macabre, and the looser free verse moves the reader back into the journey narrative and back into the loving arms of his family and the assuredness garnished from a familiar place.

The stricter formal presence in the collection consists of the haibun, prose poems, glosas, haiku, a found poem, and lyric verse. The haibuns in the collection have been slightly altered from the traditional format, providing a prose poem in place of the traditional journal entry. Consider the haibun titled "Hi, how are you today?" The title alludes to the identically titled album by the Cape Breton fiddler, Ashley MacIsaac. This hearkens to a Canadian strongly entwined with traditional Scottish folk music and Scotland tangles with the speaker's own connections to Scotland and Scottish identity while literally present in Scotland. Traveling through the highlands serves as brief meditations on the speaker's family history, travelling from Fife into the Gaeltacht, and from there to Aberdeenshire, where the speaker's grandparents and great-grandparents have deep roots and family and its history are long buried. In its entirety, the haiku appending the poem reads: "*Ciamar a tha thu?/* Here I search for the past lost/ somewhere in the breeze." The first line translates, from Scot's Gael, to "How are you?," cycling back to the title and Ashley MacIsaac's album. The second line refers, in this context, to two distinct things lost—one, the speaker's lineage, which has been established by this point to be missing a large portion, and two—the murdered and crushed Scottish highland culture. This intentionally draws a comparison to Wordsworth's poem "The Solitary Reaper" and the romantic tradition which becomes more prominent as the collection moves forward. This comparison serves to draw two points: the recognition of tradition, heritage, and language in a distinctly different culture and place, and the meditation on poetic form. This haibun serves to note a moment in the story where the speaker is in a meditative state, and the use of form embraces that, also bringing into conversation notions of heritage, formal poetic traditions, and the author's love of romantic traditions.

The haibun titled "There is No Shore" exists on a smaller plain, wherein the speaker meets another person temporarily displaced from Ontario. This haibun interacts with place very specifically, grounding both reader and speaker in a very specific place—namely, Flint's Saloon on 2nd Ave. in Saskatoon—before calling back to the poem "Who is Misplaced?" via the return of the shore birds and

what seems to be their nebulous place here (from the perspective of outsiders). Importantly, as this piece closes, the speaker has learned something, and is able to translate this new knowledge into a better understanding of place, in this instance the urban prairie. As the haiku comes in at the close of the poem we return to the themes of "not-quite-east versus not-quite-west" as the speaker addresses the woman who spurred the poem as she prepares for a return to Ontario with a similarly changed mindset, albeit on a smaller scale. This entwined piece broaches some of the broader themes in the collection--depression, moderate coping with alcohol, the dreamlike state of having place become strange and uncertain, loneliness, and deep desire for companionship—culminating together in a subdued moment in place where knowledge is found and a breath of relief is allowed during a moment of compassion and companionship in an albeit bizarre pub.

The prose poem in its ordinary form serves to dictate minute changes in the speaker's perception, usually via a meditative state on something mundane that sparks a moment of reflective quietude. The poem titled "Homosociality" features the speaker vaguely interacting with his friends from Ontario on a video call, fabricating a place to sit quietly on his balcony. The humour there interacts in a somewhat low-brow way with the speaker and his friends, referencing marijuana as a point of ludicrous humour, and the failing (more or less) to set up a quiet reflective space in a loud and unfortunately public space, violated in a very small way by this good-buddy humour. The small meal of old barbeque pork and nothing else is subtly introduced at the close, and the light food poisoning that followed is unremarkable, in a sense, for the purpose of this poem. The implied sadness and distance are focal points of the piece, although explicitly left out. After this poem, we see the speaker shift in small ways. He acknowledges that his old friends are far away and full of Saskatchewan jokes (and beard jokes, though now old hat) and moves forward in the somewhat signature awkward way established early on in the collection. In the following poem titled "This is a Spiritual Poem," we find the more obvious humour which is to be expected by this point in the collection, and the mildly demonic presence

of alcohol lingering in an admittedly not too light-handed way. The piece develops the speaker's concerns in an obfuscated way, returning all concern and worry, all the isolation and confusion to another simple place—the speaker's notion of what "Ontario" means to him.

The glosas in the collection exist for dual purposes; for one, to create a conversational tone that opens the collection more than the more rigid forms have, and secondly, to converse and interact with poetic traditions and the author's musical interests. The first glosa in the collection, "Grasslands" exists on a very strange plain, with the dismantled format distilling down into very small fragments the speaker's thoughts and interactions with a certain place, both to represent a breaking down of the speaker on entering the province of Saskatchewan, and to establish an embracing of forms throughout the collection. As the second formal poetic piece in the collection, the burden is somewhat eased, but standing so broadly opposed to both the original intent for the glosa and the politics of formal poetry creates a loose feeling of tension, paralleling the disjointed nerves the speaker is presenting therein. The title of the piece, "Grasslands," refers to Grasslands National Park, a small remaining section of natural prairie in far south Saskatchewan, and the reveal in macrocosm that the prairie is not quite the landscape Easterners would have you believe. This sentiment is echoed again very clearly in the poem titled "SK SK" at the close of the collection, containing the lines "it's not that flat, you're probably thinking of Manitoba—/ and even then, only the southern part." This sentiment established here through the speaker's blindness of place becomes this didactic sentiment at the close of the collection. Importantly, the poem with which this glosa interacts is Phillip Larkin's "Wires," describing the lives of cattle on a prairie farm and crafting a metaphor for growing up and moving on from childhood naïveté—a good comparison for the speaker's own hopes to move away from his naïveté and over the metaphorical electric fence surrounding youth, as well as a small and subtle nod towards the author's strictly formal poetic past and a moving forward from that.

The glosa titled “Refraction” features the poem “The Moon From any Window” from American poet Li-Young Lee’s poetry collection, *Book of my Nights,* and brings into view the speaker’s sister, who has, in a purposeful way, had only a very small presence. The nebulous presence of this sister is demonstrated by the nebulous nature of the poem, the reflection of the moon’s mystery brought in by Lee’s poem, and the shift of the glosa form brings the odd nature of the piece into perspective. The whole piece acts as a reflection on a moment that once again spirals out in a sort of melancholic flâneur manner. While a standard glosa features four stanzas of ten lines each and the epigraphed poet providing a line at the end of the stanza (as demonstrated in previous glosas), this particular glosa uses Lee’s lines at the opening of each stanza as jumping-off points for the speaker’s lines. The union of Lee’s reuniting with her sister unites with the speaker’s pseudo-reunion with his own sister, bridging a gap between the speakers of each poem. This theme of uniting comes through again in the next glosa, “Not Every River 2,” where it is the speaker’s love of the U.K., folk music, the sea, and music are united rather than a particular person or place.

Musical interludes like “Not Every River 2” and the aptly titled “Interlude” poems serve a few purposes, largely to imbue the pieces themselves with certain moods, though actually listening to any songs (implied or explicit) is not needed to understand the motives behind their inclusion. “Not Every River 2” stands as a slightly more traditional though still slimmed down glosa featuring a song by English indie-folk band Bear’s Den and interacts with the prior poem “Not Every River 1” in a musical sense, growing the metaphor and moving the speaker back into place. “Not Every River 2” opens with the line “Adrift in a canola ocean” uniting, in an admittedly tongue-and-cheek manner, Saskatchewan, and the speaker’s self-professed desire for a different place, in this case (and others) the sea, or large bodies of water. The musical sense is an homage to the speaker’s own musical adorations and subdued aspirations, which run through the collection as a subtle through line. This conversation with authors and music posits itself to bring in the conversations with other authors, but also the conversations with

the speaker's interests, which broadens and shallows as the collection moves, crashing like waves on the strands of the free-form poems.

Humour as a mode permeates the collection in both obvious and more subdued facets, with some poems, as "Interlude (Tongue-Tied)" demonstrates, being extraordinarily obvious and humourous (to the right audience), while poems like "By the South Saskatchewan River, October 3rd, 2018" possesses humour in a more abstract way. "By the South Saskatchewan" enacts a sort of abstract humour, being purposefully brief, pointless, and obtuse, making a comment on poetry as a potential medium for the "art for art's sake" argument foregrounding that a poem may contain just a poem. To reference again "A Bald Prayer," the humour therein comes from the speaker's lack of knowledge of place, and the stark contrast of landscape jarring perceptions and bracing the speaker for the future. Despite the presence of humour in the collection, it does not interact with the cliché of "humour as coping mechanism" on the level that is perhaps to be expected from a narrative that features incredible melancholy and a single poem regarding a lukewarm suicide attempt, the humour does not try to detract from that, or act as a mechanism from the speaker deflecting issues, &c.. Instead, the humour is a part of the author. Although it is not immediately obvious upon the reader's first encounter with humour in this collection, it becomes obvious rather quickly that the speaker is a goofy person, albeit somewhat of a thoughtless moron at times. "Of Paper Birch" demonstrates this in an exemplary manner; the speaker encounters nostalgia, is blindsided by it, and in reaching for a severe allergen in the form of birch bark suffers painfully the consequences of blind nostalgia to the hopeful amusement of the reader. The humour, in its peak form, exists somewhat for its own sake. Rather than the coping mechanism which is perhaps to be expected from a collection that so strongly features melancholy and depressive tendencies, humour is just humour. It is a part of the speaker, a part of the author, and a part of the places the collection visits, flitting by an eclectic collection of strange and wondrous things which sometimes lack definition.

Matthew Rohrer's essay "Serious Art That's Funny: Humour in Poetry" grapples with conceptualizing the mode of humour in poetry, fighting the dismissive assumptions typically relegated to "funny" poems. Rohrer writes "[t]here's a kind of humour that is as serious as the most earnest exhortation to support the troops. … Satire and irony make people laugh. But they're serious and multidimensional in a way that earnestness often just can't be, and to discount them is to be blind to the possibility of serious art that's funny" (1). Rohrer's earlier assertation that "there are lame poems out there that just tell jokes," that must still be considered poetry both attacks and applies to poems in *all the little shards* like "Interlude (Prince Albert)," "*Provenance,*" and "Interlude (Tongue-Tied)," which mostly exist to provide a specific joke—whether it be an existing joke as in "I(PA)," or a more unexpected move as in "*Provenance*"—dismissing them for that fact is an inane move, and invalidates some of the beneficial facets of humour in poems that do not exist for the purpose of a one-dimensional joke. Rohrer argues that "good art makes us think; it has more questions than answers," and it is believable that even the aforementioned poems can provide something thought provoking and important. "I(PA)" provides a rumination of Prince Albert the place, not Prince Albert the person or Prince Albert the canned tobacco for that matter. It asks the reader to experience a place through a strange and obfuscated way, making strange a normal thing with humour as the crux. "*Provenance*" possesses neither satire not irony, but in its humour twists a sexist remark into a whisky-lover's joke and characterizing the speaker as one who both loves whisky and enjoys making fun of misogynists. These moments of fun and laughter are still poetry, still art, still serious art, regardless of humour or silliness, and in this collection serve a multitude of purposes. Rohrer closes that he "has a deep distrust of artists who so systematically refuse to incorporate whole parts of their living personalities into their artistic work,"(2) and as the speaker projects and lays bare large parts of himself, humour comes through in the interest of honesty even where it perhaps shouldn't—see "By the Oven, October 8th, 2018)—and what is seen at the end of it all if an honest and painful representation of a self that is problematic and anything

but glamourous. The influence of humour predates even poems that could be serious but are somewhat silly due to their speaker. Various other influences are clear even through the humour, sometimes in the form of a reference as one could dub "I(PA)" and the multitude of other poems where humour hinges on knowledge of allusion.

Many authors have had considerable influence on this collection, and one of the largest influences comes from John Steffler's poetry collection *The Grey Islands,* which follows his speaker's experiences living in near isolation on the Grey Islands off Newfoundland and Labrador, paralleling *all the little shards'* speaker and his move to Saskatoon and away from a more comfortable normalcy. Steffler's linear narrative and cold style run through the piece, with a post-script epigraph from *The Grey Islands* appearing in the poem "Grey," which focuses on the common melancholy of the two speakers, the touching on dreams and gone lives, and the cold hard forms found in Steffler's piece.

Another Canadian poet who has had a strong influence on this collection is Don McKay. Don McKay's nature writing and poetic stylings have been highly influential on the author's approach to his own writing, particular present in pieces like "Interlude (Song for the Song for the Song of the Coyote)" which references McKay's piece, "Song for the Song of the Coyote". A more subtle influence comes from McKay's poetry book *Lependu*, as the speaker experiences haunting experiences drifting about the urban prairie, and events within London, Ontario paralleling the journeys of Lependu's spirit through that selfsame city as a point of place estrangement and stagnation before the speaker's move to Saskatchewan. McKay's influence becomes a foundation for the speaker's own style as we flit rapidly from urban prairie to wild prairie always acknowledging McKay's shadow but fighting being too beholden to it.

The free form lyric pieces in the collection contrast the more formally styled pieces breaking up the speaker's journey while still making up the largest portions of it. The weaving of different styles is

carried and bonded together by their narrative content. An article in *The Georgia Review,* written by Kevin Clark and titled "Time, Story, and Lyric in Contemporary Poetry," argues in favour of lyric poetry as narrative device, that "in our era lyric poetry is perceived as more intense and, indeed, more serious than narrative poetry," attributing a love for musicality in combination with verse over the longer and more "reportorial" narrative styles containing threads of story. Clark suggests that "lyric poetry took us inside the speaker; narrative poetry chronicled how the speaker interacted with the outer world." *all the little shards* interacts and toys both with narrative and lyric content, telling a story through an arc which weaves in these interactions in and out of the speaker—as, of course, many poems both lyric and narrative do—bringing in musicality in literal and subtle ways to provide a cohesive experience of a personal story. While "pure lyricism is virtually impossible," Clark offers that it is "a chronicling of external events [which usually prime] the reader for the transition to reflection—creates … the lyric moment." There many examples of external events creating the reflective moments in the collection. Take for example, "Waxy O'Connor's, Glasgow" where the reflective moment occurs twice in minutiae: first, through the reference to Shelley's piece "Ozymandius" in the first line, spurring a meditation on place through people, whether it be Shelley's traveller or the speaker's muted conversations with the man who had rented three-quarters of the pub for an unspecified occasion, and secondly the rumination on this mystery person's future in the closing line. This soft allusion, much like the gentle invocation of Wordsworth "The Solitary Reaper" calls the author's love for romantic practice, poetry, and notions into conversations with the collection. Clark closes with a statement uniting lyric and narrative pieces in that the only thing that "matters is that [art] evokes delight" which has been done in *all the little shards* through the telling of stories through lyric fragmented pieces using narrative devices and pulling threads of the story through musicality.

The poesis of this collection can best be described by the poetics of self-doubt. There is a moderate existential angst that runs alongside the speaker's doubt and imposter syndrome—but the

doubt the speaker feels about the various aspects of not only himself, but also place, feature most prominently. An Article by Steven Axelrod titled “The Mirror and the Shadow: Sylvia Plath’s Poetics of Self-doubt” opens with a statement that is more widely applicable to poets and poetry that feature self-doubt as a sub-textual crux:

> “[the author] sought to give birth to a creative or ‘deep’ self hidden within [them]-a Wordsworthian ‘imaginiative power’ or Whitmanian ‘real Me.’ By unpeeling an outer self of ‘dead hands, dead stringencies,’ … [they] sought to unveil and give voice to … a spirit of rebellious expressiveness” (Axelrod, 1).

This statement, referring to Plath’s poetry and her own self-doubt often found therein, is applicable in myriad ways to *all the little shards,* as evidenced in poems like “Strange Eons,” “Sunset on Proudfoot Lane,” “Grey,” and “Every Night My Teeth are Falling Out”—to name a few. The speaker’s hope to “give birth to a deeper hidden self” comes out in most predominantly in the repeating “Interlude” poems, grafting a grasp for meaning in nonsense. A strict example of this can be drawn from “Interlude (Prince Albert)”— “Do you have Prince Albert/in a can? Well you better/let him out!” On first appearance, it is, of course, that ridiculous old joke thrice the speaker’s age, placed in the collection as a small nod both to the city of Prince Albert and the national park that bears the same name. A closer inspection of the piece (with consideration to the way it is situated in the collection) provides this deeper hidden self motif, namely the attempted rationalization of self in a strange place, searching to provide that deeper meaning for the speaker’s self which is coming out through the absurdity that is the revival of this joke and the core fact that it is so aggressively unfunny and in need of such a complex explanation to get the deeper meaning that it *is* funny, or is meant to be.

Axelrod touts that Plath’s deeper self is trying to come out through a mirror and a shadow, but that “in fact, it functioned merely as an agent of anxious narcissism” (1). While our speaker in *all the little shards* uses dreams over a mirror reflection, this exact anxious narcissism is enacted throughout

the entire collection. “It was an ‘egotistic mirror’ reflecting an ugly outer being but no inner queen—a Baudelairean mirror of despair” (1-2). This idea of Baudelaire’s mirror of despair comes through the speaker’s own obvious despair and melancholy but most clearly comes through in the flâneur poems and the flâneur motifs that run throughout the collection. “By the South Saskatchewan River, October 3rd 2018,” an intensely brief piece, focuses in on a moment of time where the speaker pseudo-meditates in a specific place in nature along the urban prairie, feels an implied existential dread, and idly moves on. This Baudelairean influence (as aforementioned), through the flâneur pieces and through this dreamlike melancholy, functions as a reflective moment on place where the speaker is confronting his own shadowy lost dreams for the future and coming to terms with place identity in a new and unfamiliar way.

The poetics of self-doubt in this collection are also demonstrated less obviously through the concept of aporia—an expression where the speaker purports either doubt or perplexity, occasionally feigned, creating an irresolvable or logical disjunction in the text. While aporia has a frequently has a rhetorical role, often in the speaker asking questions of the audience, it is most clearly seen in this collection as a device where the speaker asks something of himself. “Sunset on Proudfoot Lane” features early on a question asked both by and of the speaker—“Where are we now?” in a moment of wallowing and leading the reader on to the question of shifting places later in the collection. The title, of course, betrays the place of this particular moment as the speaker’s old apartment in London Ontario, but the phrasing as a rhetorical question—one esoteric enough to seemingly have no answer—expresses doubt and a contradiction. The speaker knows quite well where he is, both literally in the physical realm, and in the mental sense where he is aware that he is sunk in melancholy. The rhetoric of this unanswered question so pre-emptively answered leads the reader to the speaker’s mental space, and has them look forward as the speaker is, to a new place.

The title, *all the little shards,* makes use of the poetic device of writing in all lowercase, which historically has been used to demonstrate a subdued or defeated attitude, or perhaps a lack of self-confidence. The tradition of all-in on lowercase can be traced to poets like e.e Cummings and the beat poets, who used the pointed absence of capital letters to shake up the strict and formulaic poetry of the past few centuries (Victorian, Modern Free-Verse) and to rebel for a variety of causes. As poetry continued to evolve lowercase letters would become less synonymous with strictly fighting formal tradition and more synonymous with delivering a certain emotion. Poets like John Betjeman avoided capital letters but used rhyme and metre, and post-modern poets would gravitate away from the usage of lowercase as it became a more popular choice. Lowercase letters in contemporary poetry became a representation of speaker's mental states, whether laid-back, supressed, silenced, or the aforementioned subdued and defeated attitude. The use of lowercase in the title of this collection is the foremost demonstrative part of this poetic self-doubt—the speaker and author are tired before the tale has even begun to be told. The decision to use all lowercase in the title also reflects the title itself—more than just alluding to this malaise and the subdued feelings of the speaker, the title itself describes a collection of small fragments with the potential to become a whole, but offers no satisfying allusion to a whole of any sort. The final two poems in the collection demonstrate this in an intensified way. "SK SK" describes a somewhat happier speaker, if still struggling with fractured identity. The implication of this piece, particularly at the close, is that even in the face of re-uniting with friends and family, and having developed new bonds in Saskatchewan, he still feels subdued and uneasy about the future and the impact the present will have on his future self, as represented by the persistent lowercase tangling with proper punctuation. "Quarantine, SK" stands as a very important piece at the close of the collection. As the speaker's time in Saskatchewan draws to a close a global pandemic sets in, mutating a place that the speaker had finally realized felt like home into a horrific anarcho-Lovecraftian landscape where people and places have substantially changed. The speaker's worries about acceptance and

happiness come to the fore violently as society is beset upon by stress and righteous fear, where friends and foes alike impose distancing beyond the social means. Alone, with Robert the Bruce the cat, the speaker's fear for his own sanity becomes the ending note for the collection, and insecurity portrayed in the breathless and capital-free piece. The ending note calling Lovecraft, and, unfortunately or fortunately (depending on the reader's views), the movie of the same name "The Colour out of Space" calls back to other poems in the collection, most obviously "Strange Eons". The author's sense of cosmic horror spirals into uncertainty as we hurtle towards the future, with a faint idea of salvation and stagnation still prevailing over Lovecraft's ending with creates a "blasted heath" where the story takes place. The end is anxious, but still tries, as the speaker is, to be optimistic and humourous. The mutated perceptions leave the reading in a state of want, but Bruce's presence grants the reality the speaker has been grasping the entire collection and brings everything back to zero where time marches ever on.

The hope for this collection, at its core, is still to tell a story. It is perhaps a simple story, of a young rural-ish Ontario man moving three thousand kilometres from everything that was ever familiar to him. The leaving of the Ontario bubble is a period of growth, it is an experience of loving the great wide country we live in, of appreciating different places and experiences. The urban prairie landscape is an alien experience for most coming from the east, and the collection will especially resonate with those who have never been to the prairie, as well as with those who have struggled with depression, substance abuse, and loneliness. While the existential anxiety never quite leaves our speaker, and the end of the collection is hardly that—the reader sees the speaker grow and change, experience a million different things all while walking by the South Saskatchewan. This mosaic of experiences is what constitute the speaker as a person, each tree or strand of grass holding the memory of time and place, where looking towards the future and uncertainty, the reader has hopefully found that resonant feeling which the speaker hearkens them to glean.

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